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ADDRESS
OF
JOHN M. THURSTON
AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE
MICHIGAN CLUB AT DETROIT,
FEBRUARY 21ST, 1890.
IN RESPONSE TO THE TOAST,
"THE MAN WHO WEARS THE BUTTON"

Sometimes in passing along the street I meet a man who, in the left lapel of his coat, wears a little, plain, modest, unassuming bronze button. The coat is often old and rusty; the face above it seamed and furrowed by the toil and suffering of adverse years; perhaps beside it hangs an empty sleeve, and below it stumps a wooden peg. But when I meet the man who wears that button I doff my hat and stand uncovered in his presence—yea! to me the very dust his weary foot has pressed is holy ground, for I know that man, in the dark hour of the Nation's peril, bared his breast to the hell of battle to keep the flag of our country in the Union sky.

May be at Donaldson he reached the inner trench; at Shiloh held the broken line; at Chattanooga climbed the flames-swept hill, or stormed the clouds on Lookout Heights. He was not born or bred to soldier life. His country's summons called him from the plow, the forge, the bench, the loom, the mine, the store, the office, the

college, the sanctuary. He did not fight for greed of gold, to find adventure, or to win renown. He loved the peace of quiet ways, and yet he broke the clasp of clinging arms, turned from the witching glance of tender eyes, left good-bye kisses upon tiny lips to look death in the face on desperate fields.

And when the war was over he quietly took up the broken threads of love and life as best he could, a better citizen for having been so good a soldier.

What mighty men have worn this same bronze button! Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Logan and an hundred more, whose names are written on the title page of deathless fame. Their glorious victories are known of men; the history of their country gives them voice; the white light of publicity illuminates them for every eye. But there are thousands who, in humbler way, no less deserve applause. How many

KNIGHTLIEST ACTS OF CHIVALRY

were never seen beyond the line or heard of above the roar of battle; I know a man wearing the button whose modest lips will not unclose upon his own heroic deeds. Let me the story tell of one. On the morning of July 1, 1862, 5,000 confederate cavalry advanced upon Booneville, Mo., then held by Col. Philip Sheridan with less than a thousand troopers. The federal line, being strongly intrenched, was able to hold its ground against the greatly superior force. But Sheridan, fearful of being outflanked, directed a young captain to take a portion of two companies, make a rapid detour, charge the enemy in rear, and throw its line into confusion, thus making possible a simultaneous and successful attack in front. Sheridan said to him: "I expect of your command the quick and desperate work usually imposed upon a forlorn hope;" at the same time bidding him what promised to be an eternal farewell. Ninety-two men rode calmly out, knowing the supreme moment of their lives had come. What was in their hearts during that silent ride? What lights and shadows flashed

across the cameras of their souls? To one pale boy there came the vision of a quaint old house, a white-haired woman on her knees in prayer, an open bible by her side, God's peace upon her face. Another memory held a cottage half embedded in the shade of sheltering trees and clinging vines, stray bits of sunshine round the open door; within a fair young mother, crooning lullabys above a baby's crib. And one old grizzled hero seemed to see, in mists of unshed tears, a brush-grown corner of the farm yard fence, and through the rails a blended picture of faded calico and golden curls and laughing eyes. And then the little column halted on a bit of rising ground and faced destiny!

Before them was a brigade of cavalry 3,000 strong. That way lay death. Behind them were the open fields, the sheltering woods, safety and dishonor. Just for a moment every cheek was blanched. A robin sang unheeded from a neighboring limb; clusters of purple daisies bloomed unseen upon the grassy slope; the sweet, fresh breath of early summer filled the air, unfelt by all. They only saw

THE DEAR OLD FLAG OF UNION

overhead; they only knew that foes of country blocked the road in front; they only heard the ringing voice of their gallant leader ordering the charge, and with a yell the little troop swept on.

“Flashed every sabre bare,
Flashed as they turned in air,
Charging an army,
While all the world wondered.”

So sudden and unexpected was the attack, so desperate and irresistible the charge, that this handful of men cut their way through the heart of a whole brigade. Then, in prompt obedience to the calm command of their captain, they wheeled, re-formed and charged again. At this opportune moment, while the confederates were in confusion, Sheridan's whole line dashed forward with mighty cheers and the day was won.

That night forty of the ninety-two kept their eternal

bivouac on the field of battle, their white faces kissed by the silent stars. The captain was left for dead, but thank God! he still lives; lives to wear the button of a people's love. For the man whose sublime courage and daring leadership gave victory and a first star to Phil Sheridan, was Russell A. Alger of Detroit. (Great applause.)

The President of the United States wears the button; a soldier and a statesman, he wears it for the Nation's honor. As the selected chief of the Republican party, his administration should receive the cordial support of every man who believes in its principles. With a Republican congress, working under business rules; presided over by a speaker whom ruffianism cannot intimidate or invective annoy, it ought to be possible to keep every party pledge. It ought to be possible to revise the tariff in such a way as to protect American labor without imposing an unjust burden upon any man who toils. It ought to be possible to complete an honest census and make a fair reapportionment. It ought to be possible to protect every American citizen in his right to live, to labor, and to vote. It ought to be possible to provide for the helplessness and old age, for the widows and orphans, for the suffering and wounds of every man who wore the Union button. (Applause.)

The Republic was saved by

AN ENORMOUS SACRIFICE OF BLOOD

and treasure. The blood was that of patriots - volunteers who received \$13 a month. The treasure was loaned by capitalists, who purchased our bonds at 40 cents on the dollar.

To-day the bondholders are clipping their coupons, and the veterans their bandages. The written obligation of the government to the one class has been loyally kept by Republican legislation, supported by the soldiers vote. Its unwritten obligation to the other should be no less binding on the conscience of the Nation. A

surplus in the treasury and heroes in the poorhouse is not creditable to a brave people. Applause.

The men who wear the button are dropping away one by one, and in a few more years they will all have answered to Heaven's reveille, but their sons remain. Their sons remain, not only to enjoy the heritage of good government, prosperity and peace, but take their fathers' places in the ranks of the grandest party God's favor ever shone upon. Most of the sons of men who wore the button are Republicans by inheritance, by conviction and by choice. They will follow the precedents their fathers set.

I remember one. In November, 1864, the union prisoners in Andersonville held an election in all due form of law. News had reached them from beyond the lines that the Republican party had renominated Abraham Lincoln upon a platform which declared for the prosecution of the war to the bitter end. They had heard that the Democrats had nominated George B. McClellan on a platform which declared the war a failure, and called for the cessation of hostilities. They knew that McClellan's election would result in a speedy exchange of prisoners and a return to home. How much that meant to a man penned up there, God only knows. To walk once more the shady lane; to see the expectant faces of love in the open door; to hold against his breast the one woman whose momentary embrace seemed more to him than hope of heaven does to you and me; to raise in yearning arms the sturdy boy who was a baby when his father marched away. It meant this, and it meant more. It meant life, and hope, and home, and love, and peace for him; but for the flag, dishonor, and for the Union, dissolution.

THE RE-ELECTION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

meant the indefinite continuance of the war; prolonged captivity, suffering and death, amid the horrors of Andersonville. They knew the issue and they solemnly prepared to meet it on that election morning. A mock

election, say you? Yes, a mock election. Its result would never be returned to swell the grand total of loyal votes in liberty's land, but in the golden book of life, that mock election is recorded in letters of eternal splendor. (Applause.) They took for their ballot-box an old tin coffee pot; their ballots were army beans. A black bean was for Lincoln, the Republican party, the flag and the Union, but the man who cast it could never expect to see home, wife or babies any more. A white bean was for McClellan, the Democratic party, the Union sacrificed, its flag in the dust; but it also was a promise to those despairing men of all most dear to human hearts. Some walked to the polls; some crawled there, and some were borne in the tender arms of loving comrades, and with the last expiring breath of life dropped in the bean that registered a freeman's will. And when the sun had set and the glory of evening filled the sky, eager hands tore off the lid and streaming eyes looking therein saw that the inside of the old coffee pot was as black as the face of the blackest contraband with votes for Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party. (Applause.)

God bless the men who wore the button! They pinned the stars of Union in the azure of our flag with bayonets, and made atonement for a nation's sin in blood. They took the negro from the auction block and at the altar of emancipation crowned him—citizen. They supplemented "Yankee Doodle" with "Glory Hallelujah," and Yorktown with Appomatox. Their powder woke the morn of universal freedom and made the name "American" first in all the earth. To us their memory is an inspiration and to the future it is hope.



